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ABSTRACT

Abt Associates' concluding report on its research of the federally funded Experimental Schools (ES) program identifies educational needs in rural schools, introduces the substance of the ES program, and presents the major findings of the research in terms of the dynamics of rural school districts and the design and implementation of federal programs to facilitate rural school improvement. The report discusses 9 areas of concern in understanding the sociocultural context of rural schools which can both facilitate and constrain the educational change process, and defines 12 problem areas likely to be faced by program planners and project officers involved in designing and implementing federal programs in rural school districts. The researchers conclude that programs and procedures which are successful in urban and suburban districts should not arbitrarily be applied to rural school districts, and suggest that the federal government reconsider the special needs and characterizations of rural school districts in light of the findings of the ES research. Appendices include bibliographies of project reports, writings, and papers, as well as a description of each of the 10 rural ES districts. (JD)

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Federal Initiatives and Rural School Improvement: Findings from the Experimental Schools Program

Salmon Point, Alaska

Liberty Notch, New Hampshire

ED192961

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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FEDERAL INITIATIVES AND RURAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Findings from the Experimental Schools Program

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1972 the Experimental Schools (ES) program within the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare inaugurated what was to become a six-year direct relationship between the federal government and ten small rural school districts. Funds were awarded to these school districts to support local efforts at planned educational change, but the major objective of the awards was to broaden the knowledge base regarding the special problems faced by both the federal government and rural school districts in collaborative attempts to plan and implement such change. The resulting research by Abt Associates Inc. has produced fourteen book-length technical reports numbering approximately 5,000 pages (see Appendix A, Parts I-III), 46 journal articles, book chapters or research monographs (Appendix B), 30 papers presented at professional meetings (Appendix C), and two synthesis documents for educational practitioners (Appendix A, Part IV).

This concluding report is directed primarily to individuals at the federal level who are responsible for the design and/or implementation of programs to facilitate educational improvement at the local level. In light of the current federal concern for both rural development (U.S. Congress, 1972) and the organization and finance of public education (U.S. Congress, 1978; Bass and Berman, 1979), there is much that can be learned from the experiences of the ten rural school districts that participated in the ES program.

Until recently there was little incentive for the federal government to pay special attention to rural districts, given the decreasing proportion of the American population living in rural areas and the concurrent decrease in the number of rural school districts due to state-mandated consolidations. However, the revival of population growth in rural America (Beale, 1975), together with the growing reluctance of rural citizens to accept further consolidation (Sher, 1977), suggests a compelling need for the federal government to attend more actively to the special problems associated with its rural school improvement efforts.

After identifying educational needs in contemporary rural America and introducing the substance of the ES program and of Abt Associates' research in response to these needs, the major findings of that research are presented in terms of two broad topics:

- *the dynamics of rural school districts:* What do federal officials need to understand about rural communities and their schools in order to be able to work effectively with them? and
- *the design and implementation of federal programs to facilitate rural school improvement:* Given the distinctive characteristics of rural communities and their schools, what types of federal initiatives are most appropriate?

Although Abt Associates' research did not systematically compare rural school districts with urban or suburban districts, the breadth of knowledge assembled in this research can easily be evaluated by others in the light of their knowledge about other types of districts. Those at the federal level responsible for the development of programs of local school improvement will want to note carefully a pervasive theme running throughout the Abt research:

> *Federal programs and implementation procedures that may work satisfactorily in urban or suburban school districts can create serious problems when applied routinely to rural school districts.*

Clearly the federal government needs to reconsider the special characteristics of rural school districts and the approach that its Experimental Schools Program used to address their educational needs. The purpose of this booklet is to facilitate such a reconsideration.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL AMERICA

Of the 17,498 operating school districts in the United States in 1970, more than 75% could be classified as "rural" ones, i.e. those with populations of fewer than 2,500 students serving isolated or semi-isolated communities.* In total, approximately 13,000 rural school districts educate more than eight million of the nation's youth in schools ranging from the traditional one-teacher building to the modern consolidated high school with more than 1,000 pupils.

Although there has been a tendency (for at least the past two decades) for the problems of urban America to dominate the attention of federal planners and policy makers, the passage of the Rural Development Act of 1972 provided a strong stimulus for increasing federal attention to rural areas, and particularly for increasing coordination among all federal agencies concerned with some aspect of rural development. The most recent in the series of annual reports to the Congress called for by this act features education as one of eight areas in need of coordinated federal initiatives (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1977).

A need for greater attention and interagency coordination at the federal level with respect to problems of rural America was suggested in recent testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Rural Development, which argued that, although one-third of the nation's school children and one-half of the nation's poor families live in rural areas, such areas receive only:

- 11 percent of library and materials funds,
- 13 percent of basic vocational aid,
- 14 percent of guaranteed student loan monies,
- 8 percent of migrant education aid,
- 13 percent of dropout prevention funds, and
- 20 percent of bilingual education monies (U.S. Senate, 1975).

Such an adverse allocation of federal funds to rural schools would be understandable if the problems of rural schools were proportionately less severe than those of urban schools. But just the opposite is clearly the case. According to the most recent quantitative comparison of the educational characteristics of rural and urban populations nationwide (Fratoe, 1978), rural individuals, in comparison to their urban counterparts, are *more* likely to:

- be classified as functional illiterates,
- score lower on national assessment tests,
- attend public schools that expend less for instruction,
- first enroll in school at an older age,
- progress through school more slowly, and
- complete fewer years of school;

*This is the definition of "rural" used by the Experimental Schools Program for Small Schools Serving Rural Areas and differs somewhat from those used by other agencies of the federal government. For the sake of simplicity, the terms "rural" and "urban" are used throughout this report to represent these two modal points along the "rural-urban continuum," regardless of the particular operational definition that may have been used by the authorities cited. Such a simplification has little effect upon the *relationship* between rurality and educational phenomena, although it can affect the accuracy of the numbers or percentages cited.

and they are *less* likely to:

- complete four years of high school or more,
- receive vocational training,
- attend public schools with support services and personnel,
- plan to attend college,
- enter college, and
- enroll in adult education programs.

THE EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM: A PILOT EFFORT TO ADDRESS THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF SMALL SCHOOLS SERVING RURAL AREAS

Overall Program Design

The Experimental Schools Program for Small Schools Serving Rural Areas was one of the few recent federal initiatives to address deficiencies in rural schooling from the broad perspective envisioned by the Congress in passing the Rural Development Act of 1972. Originally funded through the U.S. Office of Education and later transferred to the National Institute of Education, this endeavor became operational in March 1972 with the announcement of a competition for the selection of a limited number of rural schools to collaborate with the federal government in the design and the implementation of a series of "field experiments in educational change." Extensive multi-year funding awards (averaging 15 percent of the annual operating expenses of a school district, but in some instances as much as 30 percent) were made to ten geographically dispersed school districts (see Figure 1 and Appendix D) willing to plan and implement *locally designed* projects of educational change involving:

- a fresh approach to the nature and substance of the total curriculum in light of local needs and goals;
- reorganization and training of staff to meet particular projects goals;
- innovative use of time, space, and facilities;
- active community involvement in developing, operating, and evaluating the proposed project; and
- an administrative and organizational structure that supports the projects and takes into account local strengths and needs (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1972, p. 2).

The funds were authorized only to help the districts transform their educational programs in this comprehensive way; they were not intended to subsidize activities previously under way or to pay for routine capital improvements and operating costs. At the end of the five-year period, each district was expected to be markedly changed educationally, while operating at either the same per-pupil costs that existed prior to the advent of its Experimental Schools project (after appropriate adjustments for inflation), or at an increased level that could be successfully borne by the school district itself. The emphasis on community involvement in project design and operation was seen by federal planners as essential both to the identification of major educational needs within the district, and to a community's commitment to continue successful project components after the termination of federal funding.

The announcement of the Experimental Schools program, to which these and approximately 300 other school districts responded, also attached great importance to the need for the documentation and analysis of the various projects and the overall program.

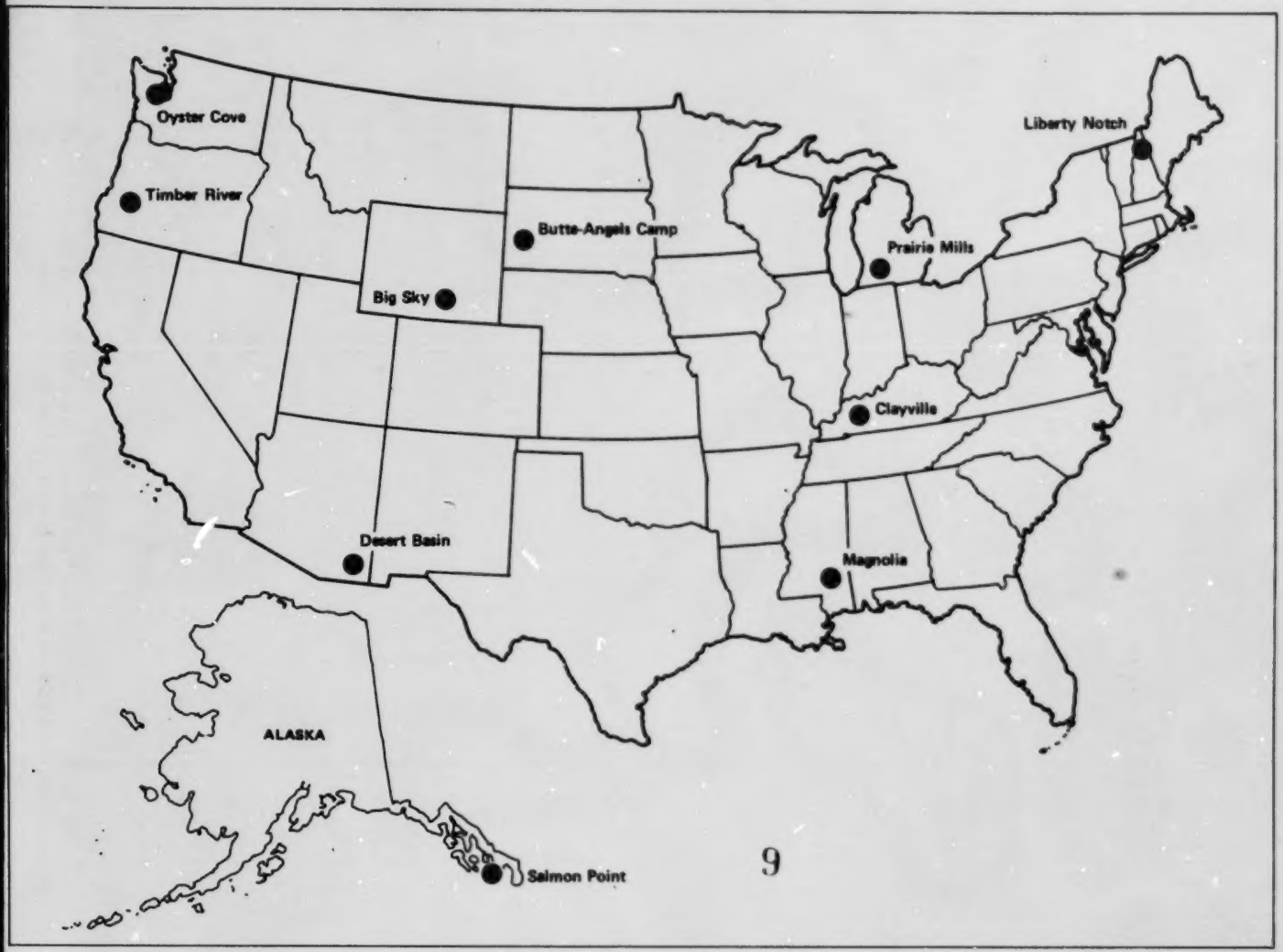

Figure 1. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS OF THE TEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING IN THE RURAL ES PROGRAM

> The Experimental Schools program, through this competition, is making available the opportunity for a limited number of rural school systems to test new ideas for educational improvement which are developed in and for a small rural school setting. Since the number of projects that can be funded is limited, and since what can be learned from them may be valuable for many small school districts, it is important to have these efforts thoroughly documented and evaluated (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1972, p. 1).

To achieve this objective, each of the ten selected school districts was expected to design and implement "formative evaluation" procedures (including the collection of data about the effectiveness of its project) for use by local decision makers.

Abt Associates' Research

In addition to funding programmatic change and formative evaluation within the ten local projects, the Experimental Schools program selected Abt Associates to conduct systematic summative research. Since its inception in June 1972, Abt Associates' study (here referred to as *Project Rural*) has utilized a multidisciplinary research approach, collecting and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data. The basic data of *Project Rural* were collected periodically during a six-year period from:

- census documents;
- standardized tests and questionnaires administered to pupils at all grade levels;
- responses to survey forms mailed to school personnel and community residents;
- informal and formal interviews with pupils, school personnel, and community residents; and through
- extensive participant observation by experienced sociologists and anthropologists, each of whom resided for over three years in one of the ten school districts.

The knowledge gathered in these diverse ways has been described, analyzed, and interpreted through a series of fourteen book-length reports presenting:

- two social-psychological studies of *pupil* change across the ten ES districts and 18 comparison districts selected in 1975 (Abt, Cerva, and Marx, 1978; Abt and Magidson, forthcoming);
- a sociological study of *organizational* change across the ten ES districts (Rosenblum and Louis, forthcoming);
- a socioeconomic study of *community* change across the ten ES districts (Fitzsimmons and Freedman, forthcoming);
- a social and educational *history* of each of the ten ES school districts prior to 1972 (Fitzsimmons, Wolff, and Freedman, 1975);
- ethnographic *case studies of local project planning and implementation* between 1972 and 1976 in eight of the ten ES school districts (Burns, 1979; Clinton, 1979; Colfer and Colfer, 1979; Donnelly, 1979; Firestone, 1980; Hennigh, 1979; Messerschmidt, 1979; and Stannard, 1979); and
- a sociological *case study of program design* and project monitoring at the federal level (Corwin, 1977).

In addition to these fourteen research reports, two less technical documents, directed primarily to educational practitioners, have been prepared:

- a *book of case studies and subjective cross-site analyses* for use in colleges and universities training educators for service in rural areas (Herriott and Gross, 1979); and

- a *handbook on planning and implementing educational change* for use in in-service workshops with superintendents, principals, and special project administrators in rural areas (Deal and Nutt, 1979).

The methods used to understand the process of federally stimulated, planned educational change in rural America vary greatly across these sixteen reports. The most extensive quantitative approach was that employed in conducting a quasi-experimental "black box" analysis of the effects on pupils of a school district's participation in the ES program (1).* Several reports involved the integration of quantitative survey data collected in all ten school districts with the narrative and statistical accounts of the participant observers (2,3,4,5,6). By and large, the broadest range of insight into the dynamics of federally stimulated change in rural areas comes from the eight ethnographic case studies, each of which represents extensive description and analysis of local conditions and events within a single school district (7,8,9, 10,11,12,13,14). The two synthesis reports (15,16) draw selected insights from the technical reports and direct them primarily to practitioners. These sixteen reports represent a substantial expansion of the knowledge base available to federal program planners about both rural communities and the process of planned educational change (for details, see Appendix A).

MAJOR FINDINGS

Introduction

The three basic routes by which federal funds typically are made available to local school districts are:

- awards to state educational agencies (SEAs) for allocation to local educational agencies (LEAs) according to criteria determined primarily at the *federal* level (approximately 78 percent of the dollar amount of recent federal funding);
- awards to SEAs for allocation to LEAs according to criteria determined primarily at the *state* level (approximately 12 percent); and
- direct awards to LEAs according to criteria determined exclusively at the federal level (approximately 10 percent).

The ES program utilized only the direct federal-local route, largely in response to the concerns of federal officials, who viewed state governments as an impediment to effective local change (see, for example, Brademas, 1970). Although it is unlikely that the current level of federal funding of local educational costs (approximately 8 percent of all costs), regardless of route, will increase markedly in the near future (Timpane, 1974), it is hard to imagine a condition in which the federal government has no interest in stimulating educational change through direct awards, or local educational agencies have little interest in competing for such awards. Thus there is much that can be learned from the ES experience about federally initiated local reform when "the 'state middleman' is not in the picture" (Kirst, 1979, p. 274).

In considering our findings on the dynamics of rural school districts and on federal efforts to design and implement rural school improvement, it is important to remember that the research upon which they are based examined only one federal program in only ten school districts and that, although these districts had been selected by federal officials to ensure diversity in their geographic locations, sociocultural contexts, and educational problems (see Appendix D), they are not a random sample of all rural school districts. Furthermore, with

*Throughout the remainder of this booklet, the sixteen Abt Associates reports are referred to simply by the identification numbers presented in Appendix A. In those two instances where a report consists of a series of independently authored chapters (reports 5 and 16), the appropriate chapter number is indicated following a colon (e.g., 5:3, 16:13).

the exception of the "black box" analysis of pupil change, the research approach sponsored by the ES program permitted no systematic comparison of these districts with other rural school districts or with their suburban and urban counterparts. Therefore, although this research has provided a wealth of detailed knowledge about the dynamics of planned educational change within these ten districts, it is limited in its ability to support reliable generalizations to other rural school districts or a systematic comparison of its findings about these rural school districts with similar findings about other types of districts.

In spite of these limitations, we have not hesitated to make some comparisons when, in our judgment, there was a reasonable basis for doing so. In order to assist the reader who wishes to explore our findings and inferences in greater detail, we have referenced all findings with the number in Appendix A that identifies the report(s) from which they have been drawn. Also presented in Appendix A is a brief annotation for each report, describing its particular theoretical, methodological, or substantive approach and some of its major variables.

The Dynamics of Rural School Districts

A basic assumption made by Abt Associates in its efforts to understand the process of federally stimulated planned change in rural school districts was that the sociocultural context of rural schools is an important factor that can both facilitate and constrain the change process. To understand the dynamics of that context, a professional sociologist or anthropologist lived full-time in each community for three to four years and prepared a case-study narrative that considered a given ES project in the light of both the ongoing educational system within which it was located and the larger community of which the system of formal education was merely one part (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). In addition, systematic studies were conducted across all ten school districts to examine pupil performance (1,2), the relationship of organizational aspects of their educational system and the process of planned change (6), and the interaction of education with fourteen other sectors of rural community life (4). From this extensive body of case studies and cross-site studies have emerged findings in the following nine areas, which are of relevance to those responsible for the design or implementation of federal programs for rural school improvement:

- the multiple functions of rural schools;
- the tension between stability and change in rural communities;
- the recency and circumstances of school district consolidation;
- the size, geographical dispersion, and population density of rural school districts;
- the heterogeneous nature of rural populations;
- the limited and precarious economic base;
- rural fears of federal colonialism;
- the shifting balance of power and authority among rural teachers, administrators, and school boards; and
- citizens' reservations about the professional license of educators.

In the sections that follow, the findings of *Project Rural* about these issues are considered.

The Multiple Functions of Rural Schools. It is essential that those who design or implement federal programs to facilitate local change efforts recognize the many and varied functions of rural schools. Whereas the typical school in a metropolitan area is charged primarily with the responsibility of preparing youth for entry into higher education or the local job market, the rural school faces much more diverse expectations. In addition to an emphasis on basic

skills acquisition and on achieving an appropriate balance between college preparatory and vocational curricula, the rural school is plagued by a tension between those who want to see it prepare youth for careers within the community itself and those who want to see it facilitate the broader career (and thus the geographic) mobility of its youth (4,9).

But there is more expected of rural schools than simply the preparation of the community's youth for college or work. Rural schools also are the major focus of community identity and pride (4,7,8,9,11,12,13, 14). High school basketball and football teams, for example, take on significance far in excess of their value as a form of physical education, with frequent conflicts arising within communities over who are to be the players (9), the cheerleaders (9), and the coaches (9,10,12), and elaborate rituals of political significance associated with community attendence at games (10). For many rural school districts, the high school athletic teams are the major means by which outsiders learn of the community, and the success of those teams is a matter of great importance in casual conversation, the local media, and even school board deliberation (7,8,9,11,12).

Equally important in many rural communities is the role of the school system as a major employer, particularly of college-educated personnel (4,7,9,12,13). In addition to being crucial to the local economy, teachers and administrators often have close political or familial ties with members of the school board or other elected officials (4,8,16:5), ties which can be invoked to effect externally stimulated change efforts (4,8,11).

Federal program planners need to recognize that the plans for *curricular* change that they seek to have implemented in rural school districts may be of only minor importance in the larger arena of rural schooling and may, in fact, conflict with other functions of schools, which are highly valued by rural residents and likely to persist (9).

The Tension Between Stability and Change in Rural Communities. In all social groups, there is a tension between those members who prefer things as they are and those who can envision a preferable state of affairs. In rural communities, this tension becomes apparent in the form of conflicts between "newcomers and oldtimers" (7,12), "local and cosmopolitans" (10), "ranchers and miners" (13), "loggers and public employees" (9). It is raised in such educational issues as "basics vs. frills" (12) and "vocational vs. college preparation" (10,13), particularly in those communities where citizens have the opportunity to vote annually on the school levy (7,9,10,12). Such conflicts can produce much turnover among the professional staffs of rural school districts as educators discover little local support for their "cosmopolitan" ideas for school improvement (7,14). Federally stimulated change efforts can often legitimize the aspirations of many rural educators, but at the risk of antagonizing those citizens who prefer stability to change (12).

Within rural communities, those who most favor educational changes of interest to federal program planners are often poorly situated within the social structure of their communities to facilitate federal goals. They are thus highly vulnerable to community pressures to "adapt" the federal agenda to more pressing local ones (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). Even in those instances where the administrative elite of a rural school district mobilizes its professional resources to respond conscientiously to the federal initiative, local preferences are likely to prevail through the dismissal of administrators (7,8,9,11,12,14) and/or the voting down of local funding necessary to continue innovative programs stimulated by federal funding (4,10,12).

Federal program planners need to recognize that the signing of a grant or contract document by the chairman of a rural school board in no sense indicates that the school system or its larger community is prepared to implement a project consistent with the goals of its federal sponsors. As knowledge about the project diffuses throughout the teaching staff and citizenry, important additional actors are likely to emerge who have the power to substantially influence the fate of the project (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14).

The Recency and Circumstances of School District Consolidation. Most rural school districts have been formed within the past twenty years through either the consolidation of previously autonomous districts (5,7,11,12,13) or a series of annexations of one-teacher "country schools" by village school districts (5,8,10). Seldom has such consolidation or annexation been voluntary; generally it is preceded by much local conflict and considerable pressure from the state department of education or the state legislature—both of which can leave scars (11,12,13,14). In rare instances, some rural school districts have successfully resisted all efforts at consolidation, preferring to operate what may appear to outsiders to be excessively small and inefficient schools at extraordinary costs to local taxpayers (9,14).

The consolidation and annexation processes have produced different organizational arrangements within school districts. The result of *annexation* is usually a rather extensive school plant housing all grades and the central administration within a single village and requiring all pupils who live outside of that village to spend as much as two hours a day riding school buses (7,10). *Consolidation* generally has involved the merging of districts, each of which previously operated complete (grades 1-12) systems in several buildings (11,12,13). Often as the results of consolidation, the elementary schools continue to serve their former attendance areas, while one of the former secondary schools is designed as the senior high school for the new district and the others as junior high schools (11). However, consolidation can take place simply at the administrative level without affecting school assignments or bus routes. Under such circumstances, coordination among the formerly independent schools can be precarious (13).

One result of the processes of both school consolidation and annexation has been the frequent creation of districts whose dispersion exacerbates the geographical or sociocultural constraints of the area in which citizens work, worship, and seek other social services (4). Such school districts have great difficulty in integrating educational endeavors into their larger social fabric and consume considerable administrative energy in merely facilitating communication within the district (4). The schools can easily become the focus of concerns which, in more highly integrated communities, would be directed at other agencies of local government (9,12). Often such poorly integrated school districts have little access to effective media for standardized communication and thus are highly susceptible to the adverse effects of gossip and rumors about the goals and methods of federally funded projects (8,9,12).

Although, from one perspective, a recent and bitter consolidation fight creates conditions that can be ameliorated through a planned change effort, it also leaves scars both in the teaching force and the citizenry, which can make what appears to be the imposition of yet another external initiative—in this case, one from Washington, D.C.—intolerable (4,13). Federal programs with "few strings attached" can do much to assist districts experiencing the aftermath of recent and bitter consolidation battles, but if the local political situation is unstable, even the slightest hint of "unanticipated federal strings" can be highly disruptive (13).

The Size, Geographical Dispersion, and Population Density of School Districts. Rural school districts vary greatly in the number of pupils they serve, the number of teachers and administrators they employ, the proximity of their buildings to one another, and the density of their populations. Nonetheless, many rural districts share common problems with respect to these characteristics. The low population density in rural areas often results in districts whose tax bases are too small to support a wide variety of educational services. When districts pool their resources and consolidate, the resulting district is often spread out over a large geographic area, which makes for difficult communication among the schools, administrators, and local residents (4,6).

Often faced with limited financial resources, rural districts are often constrained to keep their administrative staffs lean in order to minimize operating costs (9,12). Most of the ten ES districts had only a superintendent and a business manager/secretary in their central offices before the advent of the ES project (7,9,10,11,14)—even when the student body was as large as 2,300 pupils (11). Under such circumstances, there was little administrative slack for preparing sophisticated proposals to federal agencies and little specialized know-how to expeditiously plan and implement the projects. Programs designed for rural areas should take into account the fact that small size often precludes the availability of a pool of persons with the necessary time and technical skills to work on such projects. Planners should make every effort to cut down on time-consuming red tape, which is particularly discouraging to rural districts, since they often lack the experience and technical expertise, as well as the time, to deal with it.

In many rural districts, the geographical and social distances between schools in formerly autonomous areas present further obstacles to district-wide project planning and implementation (4,6,12,13,14). There may be formidable problems in involving a large segment of the population and in coordinating activities among different schools in districts spread out over a large geographic area (one district in this study was nearly the size of Connecticut), which may be exacerbated by severe climate, poor roads, and limited transportation services (13). Even when a special effort is made to contact many residents about the project and to facilitate coordination among schools in different parts of the district, planners should be aware that it may be impossible to implement a uniform program of educational change in districts that cover a large geographic area. A more effective way of introducing educational change in such districts might be to break the project into pieces that most appropriately serve the specific needs of each part of the district (4,6).

The Heterogeneous Nature of Rural Populations. Although there is a temptation for federal planners to view rural communities as more homogeneous than their urban counterparts, there are social, ethnic, and racial cleavages within many rural communities (sometimes as a result of school district consolidation or reorganization), which constitute major impediments to planned educational change (4,6). Social divisions in rural communities are compounded by the heterogeneity of the resource base and occupational structure (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). Those without power at the local level (Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans) often are the targets of initiatives at the federal level, but local educators may be reluctant or poorly prepared to facilitate the accomplishment of federal equity goals (7,16:5). Local support for addressing the needs of minority groups is also difficult to gain because the school board in many rural communities is a poor cross-section of the community's social, educational, ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity, and school board members who become insensitive to the preferences of those who elected them can easily be replace (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). It

seems unrealistic to expect that a comprehensive program of educational change will address the needs of minority residents in its design and implementation unless such residents hold positions of leadership in the community or in the project itself (4).

The Limited and Precarious Economic Base. Most rural communities have experienced a series of "booms and busts" associated with either the patterns of a westward migration, the changing American economy, or the importance of particular foods and raw materials to the larger society (4,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). Having had change thrust upon them by demographic and economic forces over which they had little control, those with some tenure in a particular community are often skeptical of external initiatives that have potential long-term financial implications for the local community (9,11,12,13,14). Only rarely does one find a rural community aggressively taking the initiative to control its destiny through the coordination of development efforts within its economic and educational sectors (4,8).

It should be noted that there is great variability in the willingness of rural school districts to invest in education (1). Even before the days of Proposition 13, most rural communities were experiencing both decling enrollments and shrinking tax bases and, although the ES program provided an opportunity to plan and implement projects that would help participating districts use their limited and shrinking resources more efficiently, the initiative was generally not successful in producing a more effective educational system along the lines envisioned by the federal designers of the ES program (16:3,7,11,13,14). Districts in which residents held fiscally conservative views had particular difficulty in mustering local financial support for project continuity when the termination of federal funding coincided with a national recession (4,10,11,12).

With its small economic base, a rural community is particularly vulnerable to economic ups and downs. Economic growth can have more visible effects on the schools than in larger communities. A single new industry that creates a few hundred jobs, for example, may attract enough new families with school-age children to overcrowd a small elementary school. In one district experiencing rapid economic growth, the time and energy required by school administrators to deal with overcrowded schools, new building programs, and hiring new teachers overwhelmed the ES project (4,6,13). But rural communities that have undergone recent industrialization may be more amenable to efforts to modernize their schools than are districts with a more stable economic base (4,6,8).

Rural Fears of Federal Colonialism. Although few rural communities are likely to refuse funding from the federal government, they accept it with considerable apprehension (7,8,9, 10,11,12,13,14). It's not that they lack experience "with the feds," but rather that their experiences have left them wary of their ability to maintain local autonomy in the face of federal ties.

Many rural school districts are unable to tax large areas of land within their boundaries because it is owned by the Department of Defense (for military installations), Department of Agriculture (national forests), or the Department of Interior (national parks and range lands). Although there are often arrangements between the federal governments and local governments for payments in lieu of taxes, such payments are generally viewed locally as inadequate compensation for the lost tax revenues (9,11). Antagonism toward the federal government also develops when decisions made in Washington about the size of fish catches, the cutting of trees, or the mining of ores have dramatic adverse consequences for the local economy (9,12,13,14). Through such experiences, rural communities have come to view federal funding with great suspicion—even in cases where its sponsors in Washington consider the

funding to have few of the constraints associated with the "typical federal program" (9). Many administrators and school board personnel in the ES districts hoped—and thought they were led to believe—that the ES program, unlike other federal programs, would be without strings. When their expectations for local autonomy in designing their projects were not met, their suspicions about the nature of federal involvement were confirmed (11,12,13). Cultural differences in speech and behavior between local and federal personnel increased the gap between the two groups (13).

After a new project has been funded, these suspicions can be either allayed or intensified, depending on how the federal project officer carries out his or her monitoring responsibilities. As the federal employees who have direct contact with local officials, project officers are key representatives of "Washington" at the local level. And yet, to the detriment of both federal and local objectives, this relationship often remains loosely defined (3).

The Shifting Balance of Power and Authority Among Rural Teachers, Administrators, and School Boards. Until recently, the issues of teacher militancy, collective bargaining, and strikes were quite foreign to most rural communities. However, during the period between 1972 and 1977, the first teacher strikes in any of these ten communities occurred (10), and strikes were rumored in several others (7,9,12). In other instances, disputes between teachers and administrators were settled in favor of the teachers when teachers successfully elected board members who shared their views (11), or after successful negotiation between them and the school board (10,11). Thus the traditional assumption of an authority structure in which the school board sets policy to be implemented by the administration through the compliance of teachers is no longer accurate. Equally inaccurate is the notion that rural school boards surrender their authority over rural education to professional educators; the power and authority of teachers, administrators, and school boards is currently in flux in rural communities as well as in urban ones. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that implementation of the type of comprehensive educational change envisioned by the designers of the ES program requires strong centralized leadership from the superintendent (6). Therefore, highly prescriptive federal efforts to facilitate change are likely to become enmeshed in, and even irritative of, local conflicts over teacher autonomy (8,10,11,12).

Citizens' Reservations About the Professional License of Educators. Rural communities seem to be particularly enigmatic with respect to just what can be left to the professional judgment of educators and what must be decided by the citizenry. Under normal conditions, school board elections are seldom contested, school board meetings seldom attended, PTA meetings infrequent, and mass meetings on educational matters unheard of (7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14). But the introduction of a program that links local educators with federal officials (or other distant sources of "ideas in good currency") is bound to produce conflicts. Although such conflicts may contribute to the successful incorporation of systemic change (6,15), they are also likely to produce considerable change in the membership—or balance of power—of the school board, the administrative staff, and the teaching corps (7,8,9,10,11,12) without resulting in enduring change within the educational system (6). Under conditions of conflict between teachers and administrators or the school board, rural citizens can become very involved, not necessarily to impose their will on the educators whom they employ, but to restore tranquility to the educational endeavor (10). "Change agents" recruited by local school officials to administer a federally funded program often become a focus for such conflicts (7,8,9,10,12,13,14).

Unlike their urban counterparts, rural school districts seem to have little tolerance for continuous open conflict. There are few organized groups in rural communities that survive a long series of educational controversies (7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14). Under most circumstances, much time is devoted during school board meetings to representing various points of view so that decisions can be reached by consensus (8,10,12,13).

In general, rural communities heed the counsel of school administrators, but only under certain conditions (6). The rural community seems to have a "zone of tolerance" within which administrative decisions are accepted without challenge. However, the boundaries of this zone are not clearly defined, and school administrators often lack the skill to recognize when they are being overstepped (8,10,11,12). Externally stimulated change efforts can affect this zone of tolerance, thus heightening underlying tensions between teachers and administrators or the school board (15). When such tensions break into open conflict, "committees of crisis" (9,12) arise within rural communities to revoke the trust and confidence generally accorded to educators (12,15) and to reassert the rights of the local citizenry to determine educational priorities. It is often a surprise to local educators that rural citizens, whom they view as unwilling to participate in project planning activities, can take such an active stance in adjudicating project-produced conflict once it seems to threaten the apparent harmony of the community (10,12).

The Design and Implementation of Federal Programs to Facilitate Rural School Improvement

Since the early 1950s, a dramatic shift has been occurring in the relationship of the federal government to local school districts. From the founding of the U.S. Office of Education in 1867 through the 1940s, the federal role in education at the local level was largely passive and confined primarily to the collection and dissemination of a series of statistics about schools and schooling. In 1950, however, federal legislation provided direct financial assistance to school districts affected by the establishment of new federal installations and, since then, the role of the federal government in the direct support of education at the local level has grown. This development goes beyond an increase in the proportion of expenditures for elementary and secondary education attributable to federal sources (from 3 percent in 1950 to 8 percent in 1975) to include a role in the determination of how such monies are to be spent. Regardless of its form, however, federal aid to local education is generally justified *at the federal level* as being needed to assist or motivate local educational agencies in adapting to changing national priorities (16:3).

Officials within the various executive departments of the federal government generally have considerable latitude, within legislative constraints, in the design of programs. In some instances such latitude is deliberate, having been build into a law in order to facilitate negotiations among federal, state, and local levels of government. In other instances the latitude develops because of either inadvertent ambiguity in the legislation itself or acknowledged vagueness of "Congressional intent" as to the purposes of the legislation. Although the formal grant or contract document is intended to limit the range of local actions to those consistent with federal-local agreements, most documents are sufficiently ambigious to create the need for active federal monitoring. This responsibility generally falls on "federal project officers" assigned to the grant or contract, who often have broad discretion. As mediators between the norms of the federal bureaucracy and the values of the community and institutions with which they work, project officers must play different roles as programs evolve, often with very limited specific training, travel budgets, and available time (3).

The remaining sections of this booklet consider the findings of *Project Rural* that bear particularly on the following twelve problem areas likely to be faced by program planners and project officers:

- the "two-culture" problem,
- the specification of program goals,
- the specification of program scope,
- the need to plan for program implementation at the federal level,
- the unit of project implementation,
- the criteria for site selection,
- the degree of guideline specificity,
- the role of a planning document,
- the duration of federal funding,
- the balance between local participation and federal monitoring,
- the design of program evaluation, and
- the provision of technical assistance.

The "Two-Culture" Problem. Due to the nature of American federalism, there is an inherent tension among federal, state, and local governments. Since the Constitution reserves to the states (and their political subdivisions) the predominant responsibility for public education, there is generally a need for much negotiation among the three levels of government in the implementation of all federal initiatives aimed at local school improvement. In the case of programs of direct federal-local funding, the state is generally unavailable to serve as a buffer between the possible excess of both federal officials and local citizens. Thus the different values of the "locals" and the "feds" can come into direct conflict.

When the locals are from the cities of Chicago, New York, or Boston, they share similar political and bureaucratic experiences with federal officials, but such is not often the case in more isolated, rural districts (13). In general, the federal government attempts to behave in logical, rational, and goal-oriented ways on the assumption that it can call upon a well-defined science of application or technology (3). In interpreting reality, making decisions, and choosing social behavior and action, the ranchers of Wyoming reflect values different from those of federal officials (13), as do the rural citizens of Alaska (5:2), Arizona (7), Kentucky (8), Washington (9), Michigan (10), South Dakota (11), Oregon (12), New Hampshire (14), and Mississippi (16:5). Many of the manifestations of these local values have been discussed in the previous section, and others will be apparent in those that follow.

Despite its good intentions, the ES program was largely ineffective because of its inability to function successfully within the culture of the federal bureaucracy in a manner sympathetic with the cultural norms of the ten rural school districts it was attempting to help (3,4,6,13, 16:3). Local planning documents were rejected by federal officials and revised by local personnel until they were unreadable (and unusable) at the local level (7,10,11,12,13,14); local staffing assignments were rejected at the federal level on the grounds that the individuals proposed were incompetent to carry out their intended responsibilities (7,13,14,16:15); funds budgeted at the local level for a week-long in-service workshop were held up for months at the federal level on the grounds that the goals for the workshops had been inadequately spelled out (13).

School officials in the local districts and staff members in the federal contracting office responsible for overseeing the ES program had very different conceptions of the function of program planning documents. To the former, such documents represented only tentative guidelines—a first approximation toward a desirable goal—which could be altered at local discretion as project implementation proceeded; to the latter, they were viewed as "promises to deliver certain agreed upon products" on a predefined schedule (3). There is an important message within the rural ES experience for federal planners and policy makers who genuinely wish to facilitate rural school improvement through direct federal-local funding: understand well the culture of the federal bureaucracy and of those rural communities with which it is to be linked, and then develop mechanisms to buffer those aspects of each culture that can serve as obstacles to the accomplishment of the shared objectives (4,6,16:12, 16:14).

The Specification of Program Goals. The intent of most federal education legislation is the eventual improvement of *pupil* knowledge and skills. However, as programs are being designed to reflect Congressional intent—and particularly as they are being negotiated with the local educational agencies responsible for their implementation—one can easily lose sight of pupil change as the major program objective. Over time such "goal displacement" occurred within the rural ES program as implementation problems at both the federal and local levels led to a shift from an emphasis on pupil change to one on school system change, and finally to one simply on limited change in particular curricular components (2,10,16). Thus it was not surprising to find no consistent evidence of pupil change that could be attributed to a district's participation in the program (1).

There is, however, a wealth of case study evidence to explain why no consistent change at the pupil level was observed (6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16). It documents the difficulty of designing effective system-wide change in rural school districts, either as an end in itself or as a means of achieving pupil change. The raising of pupil test scores is not an easy objective either to achieve or to document, even under the least complex conditions. Furthermore, if a program of rural school improvement is to be a comprehensive one—as was the case within the ES program—it is likely to be highly disruptive of normal school functioning and may initially result in a *decline* in pupil test scores (1,8,10). Federal officials designing programs to achieve the goal of pupil change need to carefully assess the seriousness and reasonableness of their objectives for both program implementation and its evaluation. Without a concentrated focus on pupil change objectives, change will not occur; and without sophisticated evaluation designs, whatever change does occur will be neither understoor nor replicable (2).

The Specification of Program Scope. It is not an easy matter to design a program capable of achieving the types of change envisioned by those who introduced its authorizing legislation. Some advocates argue that the problems that necessitated the legislation are so serious that only a radical change effort has any hope of success, while others counsel that such efforts are very expensive, highly disruptive, and likely to be subverted by conservative forces at the local level. The Experimental Schools program was intended "to find out whether new educational programs, which address all parts of an educational system simultaneously, will be more effective than past efforts which have focused on only one or several parts of an educational system at a time" (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1972, p. 1). Participating school districts were expected to plan and implement "comprehensive" change projects that their citizens would be willing to sustain after the termination of federal funding.

There was great variation in the degree of comprehensive change attempted by each of the ten rural school districts (6). Only one district attempted the type of dramatic overhaul envisioned by the designers of the Experimental Schools program (6,12). Most districts experienced great difficulty in committing and organizing themselves to achieve such radical change (6). That district that took most seriously the type of dramatic overhaul envisioned by the designers of the Experimental Schools program was wracked by repeated conflict among teachers, administrators, and community residents, which led to the resignation of most key administrators and the abandonment of many project components upon termination of federal funding (6,12).

When considering advocacy of a comprehensive change strategy, federal planners must take into account the limited capacity of most school districts to implement major programs. All ten rural districts developed ES projects that—if not comprehensive—were significantly larger in scope than anything that had been previously attempted in those settings. Yet none of them achieved the ambitious goals expressed in their formal project plans (6). For all projects, goals were not met or were significantly revised because of barriers to large-scale change inherent in the organization of the districts, including: insufficient means for obtaining information on instructional conditions within the district; dispersion of power among teachers, administrators, and the community, such that the change process could not be controlled by anyone; lack of consensus within the district and the community about the kinds of changes needed; and inadequate feedback mechanisms for identifying and circumventing barriers to implementation as they arose (6,11,15,16).

Thus, dramatic educational change as an *objective* of federal initiatives in rural school districts is replete with serious obstacles; dramatic change as one *strategy* for producing limited change that can be continued with local funds is likely to be more viable, providing those involved are prepared to encounter, manage, and endure periods of great turmoil and conflict (6,15). Such a strategy is probably a poor way to produce demonstrable change in *pupil* performance, however, since organizational turmoil and conflict can draw scarce energies away from a focus on classroom instruction (2).

The Need to Plan for Program Implementation at the Federal Level. In attempting to implement programs that are both responsive to legislative intent and sensitive to local needs, federal agencies very often find themselves caught in the middle. Preoccupation with the letter of the law can lead an agency to create a morass of bureaucractic red tape to which small districts cannot possibly respond constructively. However, failure to keep in mind the letter of the law can lead to an equally debilitating series of Congressional sanctions or formal audits (16:3).

The Experimental Schools program was neither well defined nor carefully planned at the federal level. Rather, this ambitious program was authorized directly by Congressional budget committees, which had neither the time nor the capability to assess its readiness to be operationalized. Even the several task forces that had proposed it and debated its philosophy had been unable to formulate an operational plan. When finally given the authority to proceed, the program's managers rushed it into operation, hoping to be vindicated by fast results (3,16:3). Three urban projects were funded in the first few months and two others within the first year. The rural component arose more from a reaction to the fact that small school districts failed to survive the first two selection processes than from a specific federal commitment to the special problems of rural school districts (16:3). The initial group of project officers lacked experience, both within federal government and within rural school districts, and were unable to play a strong advocate role on behalf of their constituent projects

(3). They were able to bring little effective pressure on their superiors to formalize the goals and methods of the program. While local districts were expected to engage in rational planning, examples of such planning were not evident at the federal level, a fact which undetermined local efforts early in the planning stage (3,6,15,16:3,16:12,16:14).

Federal agencies have a responsibility to carefully organize themselves before beginning to implement their legislative mandate through grants or contracts with other levels of government (16:14). Such rational planning at the federal level is particularly important in the case of small rural school districts, which generally lack experience in dealing effectively with seemingly capricious external agencies (6).

The Unit of Project Implementation. There is much controversy regarding the most appropriate target for federal efforts to assist with local school improvement. Many of the curricular projects stimulated by the National Defense Education Act of 1958 tended to focus on the classroom teacher, only to find individual teachers powerless to sustain change in the face of constraints associated with their schools or school districts. Other efforts (particularly ESEA Title III) focused more on individual schools, only to see such initiatives fail to spread beyond those schools that were being funded. Seldom were these early efforts focused on the entire district.

The Experimental Schools program arose as a reaction to such piecemeal efforts and was designed to test the efficacy of a more system-wide approach. In the case of the rural competition, the entire school district—including any feeder schools from other districts—was required to be involved in and affected by planning and implementation. However, little success was achieved in getting loosely coupled units within school districts to work collaboratively in planning for comprehensive educational change (6,12,13). In those districts where collaborative planning was achieved, it generally was dominated by central office administrators, particularly when federal officials required repeated revisions to the planning document on short notice (6,7,11,12,13). Successful implementation of comprehensive system-wide change occurred in only one district (6,12), and in this case there was extensive conflict leading to the resignations of key administrators and the discarding of many project components once federal funding was terminated. The most successful transitions from implementation to continuation occurred in those districts where the responsibility for project implementation passed (usually after much conflict) from the central office personnel, who dominated its planning and early implementation, to those associated exclusively with the particular schools where implementation took place (6).

The Criteria for Site Selection. There is a serious dilemma faced by federal educational program planners because of the failure of Congress to appropriate funding for programs at a level sufficient to fund the entire universe of eligible participants. Under such circumstances, should the limited funds be allocated to those most in need of assistance or to those most likely to use them productively?

As is often the case, the rural ES program attempted to do some of both (16:3). In selecting from among the 300 applicant districts, it picked at least two with proven track records in planning and implementing educational improvements (10,12) and two that faced severe problems of educational disadvantage and had little track record of past successes (7,16:5).

The program objective of facilitating, planning, and implementing comprehensive educational change was best achieved in those districts with prior experience with successful piecemeal change, although in no district was *comprehensive* change continued with local funding

(6). Those districts selected primarily on the basis of need encountered serious problems in the planning and implementation of comprehensive changes and failed to implement the type of widespread changes envisioned by the designers of the Experimental Schools program (6). Although the program's designers expected some such "failures," and even argued that much could be learned from studying what happens under such circumstances (3), their actual occurrence proved embarrassing in Washington, D.C. and led to unplanned (and ill-fated) federal intervention in the form of obtrusive technical assistance and aggressive contact monitoring (3,16:3). Such a shift in federal posture is particularly disruptive in rural school districts (6) and can be avoided through careful program planning and site selection at the federal level (3).

The Degree of Guideline Specificity. It is through regulations and guidelines developed within the executive branch that legislation is transformed into operating programs. Some programs operate on the basis of very specific guidelines; others prefer to keep their guidelines loose, so that the inevitable negotiations within the federal government and between its officials and those at the local level can take place in a flexible environment. But there are hidden costs to both federal and local officials associated with the misunderstanding that results from keeping things too loose.

The rural Experimental Schools program developed no expicit guidelines beyond the announcement of the competition sent to 7,000 small school districts in March 1972 (16:3). During the planning year following site selection, there were many instances when rural school officials protested the lack of specificity regarding federal intent, particularly when local plans were repeatedly rejected by the federal government (9,10,11,12,13,14).

Even the federal project officers were unsure about what a district was expected to do to meet the program's provision for "comprehensive" change (3). Although they seemed to be alert to instances when the provisions were not met, if only after the fact, they were unable to convey the specific criteria they were using to make such an assessment. Had there been some provision for local officials to negotiate such criteria, they might have been able to turn this lack of clarity to their own advantage, but there was none. Local officials were thus left constrained by the post hoc judgments of the federal project officers (3).

Small rural school districts generally lack the degree of bureaucratic sophistication typical of their urban and suburban counterparts, and resent having to repeatly guess what is expected of them by federal officials (9,10,13). Rather than engage in continuous negotiations, they prefer to strike an explicit bargain and stick with it until it is superseded by formal negotiation.

The Role of a Planning Document. Most federal educational programs require the preparation of a formal planning document. In most instances such documents are viewed as an aid to action at the local level. However, the project plan is often also intended as (or inadvertently becomes) a compliance document to be used by the federal agency to demonstrate either its compliance with existing law or regulation, or that of the local educational agencies being funded (3).

Each of the ten rural school districts participating in the Experimental Schools program was required to engage in a one-year rational planning process intended to culminate in the acceptance by the federal government of its locally developed plan. In initially requesting only brief letters of interest from all applicant school districts, the federal government was seeking information about the readiness of school districts to undertake such a process of planned educational change; but it was also being sensitive to local condition by acknowledging that small rural school districts were not likely to have the ability to write formal plans on short

notice (16:3). In the words of one federal official, "The intent of first requiring letters of interest and then paying for the development of a plan was to increase the equity of the competition and reduce the costs to those who were not selected." But a full year of project planning also made the ten selected school districts extremely vulnerable to shifting federal priorities during the planning period as to whether the major purpose of the planning document was to facilitate action at the local level or to monitor compliance at the federal level (3). By the time most school districts completed the extended process of local plan preparation, federal review, local revision—in one instance through four cycles (10)—there was little local commitment to the planning document as more than something needed to "satisfy the feds" in order to move from a one-year planning grant to a multi-year contract (3,6,7,8,9,10, 11,12,13,14,16).

There is a need for the managers of all programs involving direct federal-local funding awards to carefully consider the role of the planning process and to clarify whether the resulting document (be it a proposal or a plan) is primarily intended to serve as a compliance document at the federal level or as a guide to local action. Given the divergent values of Washington, D.C. and rural America, it is unlikely that the same document can serve both purposes (13).

The Duration of Federal Funding. There seems to be little consensus regarding the ideal term for a federal funding commitment to local educational agencies. One-year commitments certainly seem to be the norm, but they are widely attacked at the local level on the grounds that they do not permit adequate planning, particularly when federal funding decisions cannot be implemented prior to the opening of a new school year.

The Experimental Schools program was based on the premise that long-term funding commitments are essential to successful implementation of comprehensive educational change (16:3). In the words of one official, "The intent was...to provide a measure of security to the districts from the annual refunding cycle. It was felt that reducing the refunding uncertainties ...would enable districts to make greater commitments to the changes they were proposing." Although ES leaders never gained the authority to commit grant funds for the full five-year duration of each ES project, they considered the eventual compromise of a one-year planning grant, followed by a three-year contract, followed by a one-year contract extension, to be a major victory (16:3).

However, all ten districts were justifiably skeptical of the ability of the federal government to implement its plan for long-term funding, particularly in light of the problems that the National Institute of Education was having with the Congress during this period (16:3). Two districts were particularly angered by what they viewed as a unilateral change on the part of federal officials in the funding ground rules (12,13). Federal initiatives designed to facilitate widespread changes in rural school districts will clearly require funding commitments of longer than one year. In such cases, consideration should be given to the need to inaugurate "cooperative aggreements" of the type authorized under the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977 (PL 95-224) so as to provide for flexible long-term funding accompanied by explicit statements of federal monitoring and technical assistance responsibilities (6).

The Balance between Local Participation and Federal Monitoring. Most federal programs designed to facilitate local school improvements are based upon the assumption that participation at the local level by administrators, teachers, pupils, and citizens is essential to the identification and prioritization of local needs and to the eventual continuation of federally stimulated efforts with local funds. However, such an objective often conflicts with the needs of the federal agency to demonstrate accountability to its superordinate agencies and the Congress.

The rural Experimental Schools program expected its participating districts to form broad-based advisory councils, and, although this was greatly resisted in one case (8)—and proven ineffective in others (4)—major departures from previous decision-making practices in these rural communities were achieved in several instances (9,10,11,12,13) but generally did not pesist (13). However, the benefits of such broad-based participation were undermined when the federal monitoring process required school districts to make major revisions in their draft plans on very short notice (6,10,12,13). Under such circumstances, a few key administrators often took on the responsibility for plan revision and, in the hectic days that followed, many innovative ideas relevant to the objectives of the federal program, which has been stimulated through broad participation, lacked continued advocacy and were abandoned (6, 10,12,14). In other instances, such locally valued ideas were rejected by what were perceived locally as arbitrary federal actions (13). In either case, a program intended to facilitate local participation raised broad aspirations and expectations, only to frustrate them through inconsistent monitoring at the federal level (3). Federal program planners who value the role that teachers, students, and citizens can play in the process of planning rural school projects must be alert to the need to insulate the local planning process—which often can seem highly inefficient and misdirected from the federal perspective—from the pressures of the federal funding cycle, its associated deadlines, and other aspects of bureaucratic rationality (6).

The Design of Program Evaluation. Although the federal government was once willing to award funds to local school districts with little concern for how well they achieved desired objectives, increasingly federal funding is conditional upon systematic program evaluation, both at the federal level (in the form of summative research) and at the local level (in the form of formative evaluations). But there is little consensus at present as to what constitutes a competent evaluation of either type, and much debate regarding how formal (particularly how quantitative) it must be. This debate is particularly intense with respect to formative evaluations, where the intended audience is local school administrators or state officials.

The Experimental Schools program was intended primarily as an R&D effort whereby knowledge gained in ten districts would be widely disseminated. But it also expected local decision making to be both rational and based upon competent formative evaluation (16:3). Only one of the ten selected districts had any systematic experience with formative evaluation (12), and, although several others had annual pupil testing programs, they had made no previous efforts to summarize those data for system-wide decision making (7,10,11,14). In the course of planning, all districts, under repeated urgings from their federal project officers, struggled to understand the techniques of formative evaluation and to identify effective ways of applying them to their projects (3). Two districts that turned to outside consultants for assistance were badly disillustioned by the consultant's impatience in working with inexperienced local staff members (10,13). One other district naively attached great importance to improved test scores as a criterion for project success, only to become disillusioned when those scores went down rather than up (8). After its abortive attempt at externally guided quantitative formative evaluation, one district turned to more qualitative approaches and, although never formally using the results for decision making, began to see the benefit of systematic informal evaluation (13). However, none of these ten districts achieved the degree of commitment or technical skill with respect to formative evaluation that was anticipated by ES program designers (6).

The Provision of Technical Assistance. The entire process of planned educational change is highly complex and poorly understood (6,16:1). Few rural school districts have sufficient in-house expertise to effectively plan and implement improvement processes without some outside assistance. Sometimes this deficiency is quickly recognized by those at the local level

with leadership responsibilities, but often such deficiency is noted first by the federal project officer. Under such circumstances, does the project officer himself become the expert, does he or she find other experts to help the local school district, or does he or she primarily encourage the use of "experts" already known to and respected by local officials?

The rural Experimental Schools program recognized that these ten school districts would require extensive technical assistance in the planning and implementation of their change projects, but its planners were unable to anticipate the difficulty project officers would have in assisting these districts in acquiring such assistance. Small rural school districts seem to value external "experts" with strong ties to their local culture; federal officials tend to value experts with strong ties to the more cosmopolitan culture of urban America (13).

Because rural school districts lack easy access to that more cosmopolitan culture, there is a tendency for federal officials to move beyond their traditional roles as "project monitors" to the more active roles of "project advisors" or "technical assistance specialists" (3). However, such active project officer roles are very labor intensive and require strong support from program managers and their superiors. Since Congress maintains strict control over salaries and other expenses within the executive branch, federal agencies generally find it difficult to obtain sufficient staff to carry out effective, routine monitoring. Under such conditions, active roles of the type envisioned by ES program officials can at best be expected in only the very large programmatic efforts where the costs associated with federal project officers are but a small percentage of the total budget (3).

In the case of rural school districts, such active roles seem to be better played by third parties who are acceptable to the federal government (on the basis of their technical knowledge and skill), and to local officials (on the basis of their grounding in and understanding of rural culture) (4,9,13,16:10 and 14). The university-based professors of education to whom rural school districts often turn when pressed by federal officials to seek expert help seem at present poorly equipped to play such a delicate role effectively (7,8,10,13,14). A broad group of well-trained technical assistance specialists knowledgeable in the substance and technology of educational change and able to function successfully within the worlds of both Washington, D.C. and rural America are needed and should be fostered through federal sponsorship (16:14).

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APPENDIX A. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PROJECT REPORTS

A complete set of the 16 Project Rural final reports on which this synthesis report for policy makers is based is available for use by scholars and other interested persons through interlibrary loans from the following libraries:

Gutman Library, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Cubberley Library, School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305.

Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637.

Center for Educational Policy and Management Library, School of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403.

University Library, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32601.

Brief annotations for each report follow.

I. Report Based Primarily upon a Quasi-experimental Design

1. Abt, Wendy Peter, Thomas Cerva and Thomas Jakob Marx. *Why So Little Change? The Effects on Pupils of the Rural Experimental Schools Program.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., July 1978, 91 pp.

   A "black box" analysis of changes in pupil self-esteem, values, and achievement test scores attributable to their districts' participation in the ES program. Analysis involved the use of 18 randomly stratified comparison school districts that were not participants in the ES program and led to the conclusion that the ES strategy for affecting the measured pupil outcomes was neither uniformly nor generally successful.

II. Reports Based Primarily upon a Cross-site Survey Design

2. Abt, Wendy Peter and Jay Magidson (with David Hoaglin and David Napior). *Politics and Methodology in Evaluations of Educations Programs* (Title tentative). Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, forthcoming, 220 pp.

   Considers the impact of several key simplifying assumptions about the substantive nature of pupil change that hamper successful program evaluation in an environment of shifting program and project goals and imperfect research designs. In particular, challenges the assumption that such "good things" as pupil classroom satisfaction will necessarily accompany improved academic performance. Considers the utility of causal modeling as an aid in assessing the underlying assumptions about the determinants of pupil change. Argues on both methodological and policy relevance grounds for evaluators to assume greater responsibility for the development of comprehensive causal models for estimating program effects.

3. Corwin, Ronald G. *Patterns of Federal-Local Relationships in Education: A Case Study of the Experimental Schools Program.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., February 1977, 114 pp.

   A sociological case study of the Experimental Schools program as designed and implemented at the federal level with particular emphasis upon the roles of the federal project officer as "project monitor," "project advisor," and "technical assistance specialist." Examines the advantages of different role definitions under different conditions.

4. Fitzsimmons, Stephen J. and Abby Freedman (with Thomas E. Ferb, Warren G. Lavey and Lorrie I. Stuart). *Community Barriers and Incentives to Educational Change: The Rural Experimental Schools Program* (Title tentative). Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, forthcoming, approx. 250 pp.

   This volume presents a rural development approach to the problem of educational change by viewing public education in relation to its local environment, the community it serves. Schools are not seen as isolated organizations but as one of fifteen social institutions that are affected by their communities and have the potential for making a long-term impact on the community. The analysis integrates standard socioeconomic data about rural communities with the reports and narratives of experienced participant observers.

5. Fitzsimmons, Stephen J., Peter C. Wolff and Abby Freedman (Editors). *Rural America: A Social and Educational History of Ten Communities.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., April 1975, (1235 pp., plus summary of 41 pp.).

   A collection of social and educational histories of the ten rural school districts participating in the ES program from the time of their earliest settlement through 1972. The presentations for each community include: basic geography, geology, and ecology; early settlement; general development through the early 1960s; and contemporary demographic, social, economic, political, and cultural community characteristics. Special emphasis has been given to the patterns of school district annexation and consolidation within these districts.

6. Rosenblum, Sheila and Karen Seashore Louis (with Nancy Brigham and Robert E. Herriott). *Stability and Change: Innovation in an Educational Context* (Title tentative). New York, New York: Plenum Publishing Corp., forthcoming, approx. 400 pp.

   A sociological analysis of the process and outcomes of planned educational change. Utilizes a blend of survey data, expert testimony, and case study reports to explore the effects of organizational properties and the nature and strength of linkages between various parts of educational systems in explaining the implementation and continuation of new programs. Presents implications for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

III. Reports that are Site-Specific Case Studies

7. Burns, Allan F. *From Rural School Project to Rural School Problem.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 288 pp.

   This case study of the Desert Basin (a pseudonym) community and its ES projects is descriptive in style and ethnographic in approach. Central to its analysis is the assumption that the actions of participants in planned change are guided by their perceptions and interpretations of social structure and process. The study draws on traditional and current work in cognitive anthropology and the ethnography of education to interpret events within the schools of Desert Basin, its Experimental Schools project, and the community itself, viewing these arenas as three aspects of a single social system. The study examines planned educational change within a heterogeneous cultural context of farmers, ranchers, Mexican Americans, and newcomers to this Sun Belt community.

8. Clinton, Charles A. *Local Success and Federal Failure: A Study of Community Development and Educational Change in the Rural South.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1979, 218 pp.

   For more than 30 years federal programs have been impinging on local communities with good, bad, and, above all, unexpected results. This is a case study of a southern community that is making impressive strides in the area of developmental change and brings us closer to understanding the process of such change through its analysis of the differences between local programs and federal initiatives. Clayville (a pseudonym) entered the 1960s as an agricultural community in quest of an improved quality of life. While local programs of change had clear outcomes, including the conversion of the county's schools from an ineffective educational system to one of the best in the South, most federal initiatives were stymied by Clayville's political decisions and processes. Using a natural history approach, the author focuses on Clayville's political processes in terms of three important contextual variables: familialism, religion, and community affilation.

9. Colfer, A. Michael and Carol J. Pierce Colfer. *Life and Learning in an American Village.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 302 pp.

   This case study of Oyster Cove (a pseudonym) presents a detailed ethnography of both the community and its schools as a context for its ES project. The volume's emphasis is upon those aspects of community life that can serve to "de-fuse and diffuse" the impacts of planned change efforts. The volume considers in detail a series of social distinctions associated with age grading, sex, and work roles and explores how these distinctions are reinforced by the "hidden curriculum" of schooling. A concluding section offers insight into why substantial and lasting change in contemporary schooling is so difficult to achieve.

10. Donnelly, William L. *Continuity and Change in Rural Schooling.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 233 pp.

    This case study of Praire Mills's (a pseudonym) ES project is sociological in perspective and focuses on the forces of stability and change within the community and its educational system. Emphasis is given to the changing power relationships between administrators and teachers and to the role played by laymen when conflict arises between the two. The volume examines in detail the effects of unplanned events (particularly a teachers' strike and extended antagonisms among teachers, administrators, and the school board) on the process of planned educational change, with major emphasis upon the need for adaptation of project plans and strategies. Particular attention is given to conflict within a school organization as a basic organizational process affecting both planned and unplanned change.

11. Firestone, William A. *Great Expectations for Small Schools: The Perils of Federal Programs.* New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1980, approx. 200 pp.

    This case study tells how the Butte-Angels Camp School District (a pseudonym) coped with a major federal initiative. After three years of turmoil, what was supposed to be a comprehensive program of individualized education declined into a collections of disconnected subprojects. The study raises important questions about the ability of educational institutions to innovate rationally, the usefulness of staff participation to build support for change, and the federal government's effectiveness in promoting school improvement. Direct observation and informal interviewing of community residents, teachers, and administrators—supplemented with survey data—are used to identify some of the local and federal political forces that can subvert change.

12. Hennigh, Lawrence. *Cooperation and Conflict in Long-term Educational Change.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 191 pp.

    This case study of the ambitious ES project in Timber River (a pseudonym) is primarily descriptive in style with an analysis of school-community relationships. Both description and analysis are directed by the assumption that people interact on the basis of cognitive models of their social environment. The volume is rich in narrative detail regarding the assimilation of urban populations in rural communities, the Oregon taxpayers' revolt, the effects of unanticipated change upon planned change, the power of local citizens to balance the forces of planned and unplanned change, and the role of unanticipated events in all change processes.

13. Messerschmidt, Donald A. *The Local-Federal Interface in Rural School Improvement.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 293 pp.

    This case study of Big Sky (a pseudonym) is anthropological in perspective and focuses on the problem of introducing educational change from a cultural distance. The cultural context of rural Wyoming (with its emphais upon being hard-working, hard-living, honest, lonely, and friendly) is presented in rich detail and contrasted with that of the federal government in Washington, D.C. (with its emphasis upon being logical, rational, and goal-oriented). The interaction of these two cultures through the vehicle of the Big Sky ES project is seen as a major determinant of its fate.

14. Stannard, Charles I. *Problems of Project Direction and Coordination.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., May 1979, 335 pp.

    This case study of Liberty Notch (a pseudonym) provides a detailed documentation of the efforts of three autonomous school districts to collaborate in the design and implementation of an ES project. The volume provides extensive narrative about the issues of federal-local relations, inter-district relations, planning problems at the level of the supervisory union, and implementaion problems within each district. The problems of planning and implementation are attributed to localism, lack of community support, limited staff competence, and impaired communication with the federal sponsors.

IV. Synthesis Reports Prepared for Practitioners

15. Deal, Terrence E. and Samuel C. Nutt. *Promoting, Guiding, and Surviving Change in Small School Districts.* Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Associates Inc., June 1979, 66 pp.

    This paperbound booklet has been prepared for persons currently employed as school principals, superintendents, or directors of special projects in rural areas. Using the technical reports as its primary source materials, it considers sources, problems, and strategies of change in schools; various images of schools and their implications for the change process; planning for change; the successful implementation of change; and offers guidelines for facilitating creative change in small school districts.

16. Herriott, Robert E. and Neal Gross (Editors). *The Dynamics of Planned Educational Change: Case Studies and Analyses.* Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1979, 411 pp.

    This hardbound book has been prepared for use by persons enrolled in formal educational institutions in preparation for assuming leadership roles in educational change efforts at the federal, state, or local level. It presents chapter-length case studies of five of the ten rural ES projects (drawn from the more extensive book-length case study reports) and offers extensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach of each project from the perspectives of a school superintendent, an experienced consultant, a designer of federal programs, a specialist in federal-local relations, and a specialist in the training of educational practitioners. Also presented is a model of the educational change process that can serve as a checklist for identifying potential obstacles likely to be encountered at the local level.

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APPENDIX C. BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PAPERS PRESENTED AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

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APPENDIX D. THE TEN RURAL EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS*

Salmon Point. Salmon Point is the smallest and the most isolated of the ten districts. Located on an island in southeastern Alaska, it has no paved roads and is served by charter flights, daily amphibious flights, and a weekly boat service. Its population in 1970 was 300 people, of whom 50% were Indians. (However, during the project years, the population increased by 25%.) Employment is seasonal and uncertain, but a growing lumber industry may bring with it economic and cultural changes.

The school population was 112 students served by a staff of nineteen in two school buildings. At the time Salmon Point applied for ES funds, the annual school budget was $312,000 with a per-pupil expenditure of $1,215.

Teachers in Salmon Point had considerably less teaching experience (an average of 2.4 years) than teachers in the other districts. The district staff had a comparatively high morale, although Salmon Point experienced the highest staff turnover of any of the ES districts over the course of the project years. Compared to the other ES districts, both the superintendents and teachers were seen as having a great deal of influence in decision making. The school board had a comparatively low amount of influence.

At the time of the Rural ES Announcement, the superintendent had already begun a program of change in the schools and in the Letter of Interest stated his interest in continuing it. In the Letter, the superintendent also spoke of the isolation of the community's children, who grew up unaware of any culture but their own.

Prairie Mills. Prairie Mills is one of the more industrialized rural communities that participated in the ES program. Half the labor force in 1970 was engaged in manufacturing, although farming is still an important industry. Located in southwestern Michigan, the school district reached its current size through the annexation of smaller districts between 1951 and 1970. It is located in parts of two counties containing towns and rural areas. Its population was approximately 5,000 and the school district served 1,648 students in four schools with a staff of 92. In 1971-72, when the district applied for ES funding, the total annual budget was $1,260,000 with a per-pupil expenditure of $787. The largest employer in the district was the school system.

Teachers in Prairie Mills had a significantly higher educational level than did teachers in other districts—but were similar to other districts in age and number of years of teaching experience. Morale in this district was comparatively low, with almost all teachers noting that the inadequacy of appropriate instructional materials and supplies was a major problem. The most important educational goals identified by teachers were that students think for themselves and that students get an education geared to their individual needs. Principal authority was particularly strong.

Shortly before entering the ES program, Prairie Mills students had been administered a battery of tests as part of a state-wide testing program, which showed their self-esteem overall to be low. The theme of the Letter of Interest was built on this finding and on the district's desire to develop a program that would pay particular attention to students who were not experiencing success.

Big Sky. Big Sky has the largest geographical area and one of the most scattered populations of the ES rural districts. Consolidated from five school districts the year of its entry into the ES program, Big Sky comprises an area the size of the state of Connecticut, is located in south central Wyoming, and contains eight towns. Sheep and cattle ranching and mineral extraction are major industries, and some tension exists between "ranchers" in the southern part of the district and "miners" in the north. Residents are united, however, in mistrust of the federal government and easterners in general. The population in 1970 was slightly over 4,000 but was rapidly growing due to expansion in its coal mining industries. There are twelve schools and a staff of 129 was serving 1,294 pupils. At the time ES began, the school budget was $1,669,666 and the expenditure per pupil was $1,329.

*In consideration of the privacy of the districts, pseudonyms have been used.

In the Letter of Interest, which was written primarily by the assistant superintendent, the theme was one of using ES as a catalyst for unity: the program was seen as an opportunity for five previously autonomous school districts to work together to overcome the problems caused by the large geographic dispersion and low population density.

Clayville. Clayville, which is located 90 miles from Louisville in northwest Kentucky, had recently experienced industrial expansion, which caused a 32% growth in population from 1960 to 1970. Previously an agricultural area, the employment pattern became one divided between farming and manufacturing. The economy continued to expand slightly during the ES years.

The Clayville school system underwent consolidation 14 years prior to the ES project. The population in 1970 was just over 7,000. 1,490 students were enrolled in four schools with a staff of 78 (a fifth school opened the second year of the project). At the time Clayville entered the ES program, the annual school budget was $1,243,000, with a per-pupil expenditure of $739.

Teacher morale was particularly high in Clayville, which experienced the lowest turnover rate of any of the ten districts during the five years of the project. Much of the stimulus for participation in the ES program came from the influx of new workers from more sophisticated communities who came to work in the new industries and who initially found the Clayville schools inadequate. Many of these workers chose to live outside the county and were a tax loss to the county schools. It was the industrial consortium, whose interests lay in making Clayville an attractive place for their workers to live, that commissioned a private research organization to carry out an extensive needs assessment of the county school system. The school board subsequently took action by hiring a dynamic new superintendent from outside the district whom they perceived and who perceived himself as a "go-getter." He promised to build Clayville a school system they would be proud of.

The arrival of the Announcement of the ES program into this milieu was very timely and the superintendent responded eagerly. Not trusting the local expertise, he secured consultants from a nearby university to help write a Letter of Interest based on the findings of the recently completed needs assessment.

Butte-Angels Camp. Butte-Angels Camp consisted of two South Dakota communities on the west central border of the state. The major source of employment is the local gold mine, and the local economy fluctuates with the price of gold. In 1970 the county had a population of just under 10,000, approximately 7,700 of whom lived in the two towns of Butte and Angels Camp.

The school district was consolidated one year prior to the ES project, with a staff of 155 serving a student population of 2,217. The 1971-72 school budget was $2,531,900, with a per-pupil expenditure of $1,176. The number of students served puts Butte-Angels Camp at the upper end of the ES districts in size, and there was some feeling on the part of ES/Washington that the district was really "too big" for the rural schools competition. (Butte-Angels Camp did, in fact, apply for the urban program of ES, before the Rural Announcement, and was rejected for being too small.)

The theme used by the superintendent in his Letter of Interest was based on an individualized education technique called diagnostic-prescriptive instruction (d/p). The superintendent was considered by the local staff to be particularly "ambitious" and there had already been some tension between him and the district's teachers, who felt that his pursuit of "improvement" had brought them longer hours and more work without much reward.

Liberty Notch. Liberty Notch is not technically a school district but rather a governance unit (known as a Supervisory Union) of three separate school systems in northern New Hampshire. The superintendent who serves the Union is an administrator whose authority is otherwise extremely limited. At the time of its entry into the ES program, Liberty Notch was classified as an economically depressed area with 23% of the families earning less than $3,000 per year. The primary source of employment is in forestry and forest-related industries. Thirty percent of the population is either foreign-born or born of foreign parents, including a rather large French-Canadian population. The district population was approximately 3,500 in 1970.

A total professional staff of 91 in four schools serve a student population of approximately 1,150, some of whom come to the schools from neighboring Vermont. Teachers in Liberty Notch have a relatively low educational level; very few have more than a bachelor's degree.

The Letter of Interest was the work of one principal in one of the school districts involved in the Union and was intended as an application for his own district only. His theme was one of developing a "model school" to serve as a community focal point. Students were to be involved in work-study vocational programs and education would be made relevant to the learner and to the realities of the environment. A central part of the theme was the use of the school to serve the community by providing psychological services, which were, according to the Letter, desperately needed because of the bleak environment and lack of opportunity for people in their surroundings.

In retrospect, it is evident that for Liberty Notch, the insistence of ES/Washington that the three school districts must become partners in the project and function (as they ordinarily did not) as a single unit, was a problem from the outset. While there was some reluctance to form the partnership, the promise of so much money brought the other two districts of the Union into the program.

Magnolia. Magnolia school district is located in the southeastern corner of Mississippi. The county is about 80% forested and the primary sources of employment are forestry and farming. In 1970 the population was 9,065, approximately 74% while and 26% black.

The school system was integrated without court order in 1970. At the time of the ES competition the district served 1,555 students (of whom one-third were black) in six school buildings with a staff of 119. The annual school budget was $758,000 and the per-pupil expenditure was $672.

A major impetus for Magnolia to enter the ES competiton was its recent desegregation, which made visible the disparity of the formerly separate systems. Ciritical reading deficiencies were found at every grade level and the poverty of the district made it difficult to obtain appropriate instructional materials. The Letter of Interest was based on a recently completed formal needs assessment that had been conducted by school district personnel with assistance from a university consultant. The Letter acknowledged that the school system was basically disorganized and in need of change in staff, equipment, and teaching materials. The Letter of Interest was composed almost single-handedly by the curriculum director, who had the expertise to compose the document but who left the school district shortly thereafter.

Oyster Cove. The two communities that comprise the Oyster Cove district are located in the northwest part of the state of Washington. Logging and related industries are the major source of employment for the approximately 2,000 people in the district.

The second smallest (next to Salmon Point) of the ES districts, the school population in Oyster Cove was 286 students served by a staff of 27 in two schools. At the time of the ES competition, the annual school budget was $321,000 and the per-pupil expenditure was $1,016.

In Oyster Cove the schools are supported by a combination property tax revenue and annual special levies. These levies cause periodic scrutiny of the schools and some criticism of their expenditures and the quality of education. In 1970-71 a concerned citizens group prevailed upon the school board to request an external evaluation of the system by the state. The Letter of Interest prepared by the superintendent was based on the recommendations made in that evaluation.

As in Liberty Notch, the requirements of the ES program for a K-12 population to be involved in any local project caused a partnership with the neighboring community, which sends its eighth grade graduates to a high school in Oyster Cove but is otherwise autonomous. This temporary partnership was a source of some problems in planning out and implementing the project. In 1974, the neighboring community dropped out of the program and Oyster Cove continued alone.

Teachers in Oyster Cove are somewhat younger than in the other districts and the district experiences a rather high staff turnover rate.

Timber River. Timber River school district is located 250 miles south of Portland, Oregon. Its population of approximately 10,000 is predominantly white, although there are some American Indians. Employment is diverse and includes lumbering, mining, farming, tourism, and business.

The school system at the time of entry into ES contained six schools with a total enrollment of approximately 2,500 students served by a staff of 118. The annual school budget was $2,223,848 with a per-pupil expenditure of $884. In terms of assessed valuation per pupil, Timber Riber was the poorest district in its state.

In its Letter of Interest, Timber River focused on eight top-level administrators as the district's major strength. Although this was a rather unusual statement (other districts tended to include teachers and community residents as a strength), Timber River did have an unusually sophisticated and experienced administrative staff; for instance, the superintendent and associate superintendent had both formerly been federal program officers in Washington, D.C.

The Letter portrayed Timber River as a district that already had taken several steps prerequisite to educational change, including needs assessment, staff training, and some curriculum development efforts and proposed the creation a "new learning climate" throughout the school system.

Desert Basin. Desert Basin is situated in the southeastern corner of Arizona, 85 miles from Tucson. In 1970 the school district population was approximately 4,500, with a sizeable Mexican-American population. Forty-eight percent of the county population is involved in white collar occupations such as tourist service, farm and ranch management, education, health, and agricultural service.

The school system had the longest history of being consolidated of any of the ES districts (32 years) and served 1,433 students, of whom 26% were Mexican-American, at the time of the district's entry into the ES program. There were three schools located on a single campus—an elementary school, middle school, and high school with a total staff of 78. The 1971-72 budget was $1,233,120, with an average per-pupil expenditure of $886.

The Letter of Interest stated the bicultural heritage of the residents to be one of the strengths of Desert Basin and suggested that elements of cultural diversity be built into the curriculum of the schools. The major problems of the school system, according to the Letter, were almost all in the area of curriculum, which was said to lack both scope and sequence. The secondary focus of the Letter was on the community: finding ways to draw in community members as a cultural resource (particularly the Mexican-Americans) and also finding ways to make use of the school facilities as a community resource.